

Christmas Redone

by Orblover

“*So this is Christmas...*,” as John Lennon sang.

Yeah. Bah-fucking-humbug.

Every year! The same time each year! The same-old-same-old. Cheer. Joy. The false greetings. The mercenary exchanges of baubles and junk.

The annual reminder of so much sorrow.

Yes, yes, yes. I know. My upbringing says I should go down to the local church and kneel inside the confessional.

“Forgive me Father, for I have sinned,” I should begin.

Right. I’m human and had human reactions to a life gone sour. The joy sucked from my soul. I’m supposed to ask forgiveness for this?

Instead, I stand on the steps of the church and demand from the guardians of heaven, “When is God going to offer me forgiveness?”

They argue with me. They ban me. They shun me. Proudly, to me, they call me a heathen. A Godless soul.

That time of the year rolls around again. Pretty lights. Nice music. But, where is the perfection of “It’s A Wonderful Life”? Where is the humor of “A Christmas Story”? Where is glamour of “Holiday Inn”? Where exactly did the miracle on 34th Street go? Did the Grinch really steal Christmas and was the happy ending banned by life’s censors?

Sorry God. I lost faith.

So, here I sit. On Christmas Eve. In a bar. The owners must be Godless heathens as well, for they are opened for normal bar hours on this special night. No rush to get home. No last minute gifts to buy. Just order another double. The magic of alcohol having no affect. Or, is that effect? Nope, that’s not happening either.

“Merry Christmas,” slurs another patron on the way out the door. Obviously filled with the new Christmas Cheer – at least 40% pure alcohol’s worth. In shot form. They must have been in a hurry to down so many in such a short period of time. Not taking one moment to savor the taste.

What happened to mistletoe and eggnog with friends and family by the home’s warm hearth? When did we stop going caroling door-to-door?

“So, my friend, what has you so pissed off tonight?” Ah, an insightful barkeep. Must have seen through the dark clouds hanging over my head and my surly attitude to divine my true feelings.

“Pissed? Not yet. A few more doubles and I will be.” I’ve spent too many years in the UK to let that one pass.

“Sure. In the meantime, why don’t you tell me your story. I’ll listen.” Great. One of the last barmen shrinks.

“As if it would make a difference.” Me? Surly? Naw...

“Hey, I’m only offering.” An eternal optimist. Must not know Murphy or God real well.

“Well, why are you here tonight?” Got him on that one.

“To offer lubrication and compassion.” No superior look from him.

“What, like the snake-oil salesmen in the local religious Ponzi schemes keep preaching?” Take that, you meddling asshole. I’d say that to your face, but I want more booze.

“I think it’s time for you to head home.” His threat was said softly. No storm troopers around to try to physically remove me.

“I’m not done.” Yeah. Take that.

“You are done here. That last drink is on the house. Now, head on out.” Wait. Shouldn’t he be yelling, pointing, threatening? All the others do. His voice remained soft. Kind.

“So much for compassion.” That’s my upper cut. Wait until you feel my roundhouse kick.

“I have tons, even for you.” His voice still gentle. Caring? He made no effort to remove the last of my whiskey and water. Double. Well brand. Yeah, as cheap as it gets. But, damned powerful. Usually.

I slowly rotated the glass, watching the last of the highball swirl with what was left of the few pieces of ice I’d requested. I found myself listening to my own voice.

“Ten years ago, my parents were taken from me this evening...” My eyes became moist.

“Man, that’s tough.” His voice was soft. Inviting. My voice kept talking.

“Three years ago, my eldest son, his wife, and their three children were taken from me...” I waited for the usual. The questions wanting more information that I really didn’t feel like repeating for the ten billionth time. Or the sympathy routines of like stories that have nothing to do with mine.

“Feel free to let it out. I’ll listen.”

“What?” Did a 4x4 just hit me in the back of the head?

“If you want to let it out, I’ll listen. If you don’t, that’s fine.” Yeah. Right. Yet the mouth started without assistance from the brain, nor permission from the heart.

“My parents were killed in a car wreck. Hit by a drunk driver. Which is why I might drink, but I don’t drive after. My son and his family...” Why are my cheeks wet? It’s not raining, so the roof ain’t leaking. “Their home burnt down. Fault of the Christmas lights and a faulty smoke detector the investigators say.”

I suddenly found myself emptying my soul of the pain, just as I’ve emptied my stomach many times over the past few years. He listened. His presence comforting. Another drink appeared. Not nearly as strong. Just lubrication.

Other patrons stopped and listened. Why were their faces wet as well?

I mentioned my wife, some form of something, I knew it was from a broken heart. That was when I quit.

In spite of the booze, my head cleared. As the words flowed, my heart felt freer. The clouds in my head were blown away.

Silent Night came on the speakers. One-by-one we began to sing it. Softly.

In the taxi headed towards home, I asked the driver to make a stop and wait for me.

“Hi Mom and Dad. Hi James, Cheryl, Mathew, Sally, and Chrissy. I miss you guys.”

The rain drops became a stream as I looked at the headstones for the first time. I found myself with them all. Feeling their presence. And their love.

The meter total approached the National Debt. I must have been visiting for a while. As I looked at the dark, empty house, I wondered if it was too late to put up lights, I handed the driver twice the tab.

“Merry Christmas,” came from deep within.

“Thank YOU! And a very merry Christmas to you, sir.”